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Well, damn.



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MOOD: 😞 miserable

MUSIC: the din in my head

In the discipline of psychology, a projective test is a test designed to allow a person to respond to ambiguous stimuli, thereby (presumably) revealing something about that person's psychology because of what he or she *projects* into the response.

The most famous of these is the Rorschach Test, in which the subject is offered a series of ten symmetrical ink blots and asked to describe what they suggest. But there are others--the art assessments like the DAP and the Kinetic Family Drawing, each of which is alleged to reveal something about the personality and damage of the interviewee.

These tests are controversial, because of course whoever is scoring the test is projecting too. It's a little like an English Lit grad class--the artist is projecting *into* the art. The student is projecting *upon* the art. And the professor is projecting on the student's discourse on the art, and nobody is seeing what's really there. They're just seeing what's in their own heads.

Psychology and profiling are pretty much the same thing. You try to submerge yourself enough to hold up a mirror to somebody else, but if you are honest, you're always aware that you're there, influencing what the mirror shows.

There's one projective test called the HTP. House-tree-person. It's scored about the same as all of them--subjectively. You draw pictures, and then as your psychologist I ask you questions about them. Your pictures and your answers presumably tell me all about you.

I don't scorn subjectivity. My job is subjectivity, and my job saves lives.

But here. See. There is a three hundred and fifty page manual devoted to interpreting this thing. If the face of the person is very detailed, this may indicate somebody who is very concerned with

how they are perceived. If the house is very small, then the subject's home life is believed to be deemed unimportant or distanced.

It may all be hogwash.

When I was a child, I drew a lot of houses and people and trees.

A typical childhood house has a face and is about the same size as the figure of the person. A typical childhood person is a stick figure with a smile. A typical childhood tree is a symbol, a lollipop with a fluffy green head.

But after I was alone, I stopped drawing those kinds of trees.

I drew winter trees, with cadaverous grasping branches and groping roots. I lavished endless attention on the tiny forking twigs, the parallel lines of the bark, and the way the humped roots crawled into the soil. I drew a lot of elm trees, because those were the dead trees I saw as a child. Vegas got the elm blight late, you see--it's isolated. A kind of city-state in the desert.

Some of its American elms are still dying.

But here's the thing.

After I was left alone (see? I still use the euphemisms. *After my mother died of a drug overdose* is one of those phrases that is nearly impossible to type. You type it and you pull your hands away from the keyboard and you look at it. And then you delete it and you start again with something softer this time.)

(Abuse survivors often use "you" as a first-person pronoun. It's distancing. Serial killers prefer "he.")

After I was left alone. every single tree I drew was hollow. And you could see that it was hollow. It has a thick bole and a heavy scar and a dark, dark space where the heartwood had been eaten away through the wound the broken branch left in it. You can't miss how broken it is, that tree.

The thing about these tests is that they depend on the subject's naivete.

I'm not dumb, guys. I figured it out. I learned that those broken trees inside me told the world that I was broken too.

I saw the trees my classmates drew and I copied them. I made them perfect. For the KFD, I drew my foster families as if I were actually a part of them. I got the scale and perspective right. I put the co-fosters I hated just as close as the ones who helped me out, who gave me things, who snuck me extra food at night. I didn't give them monstereyes or jagged fangs.

I never stopped *wanting* to draw those hollow trees. I never stopped seeing them in my mind. I just learned to stop actually putting them out there where they could be seen.

She's not a psychologist, but she's a behavioral analyst. And her best friend is a psychologist, and she works with a couple more. She could hardly fail to have picked some of this stuff up, hey?

So today I went to the monster zoo, and I watched through the mirror while she went through her therapy session.

Art therapy.

Drawing trees.

...

Perfect fuzzy fucking lollipops.

This looks like a
good idea.

...

This.

...

Little guy's not
bad.

Gotta teach RHex
to smear.

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